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DÁIL STATEMENT ON NORTHERN IRELAND,

BY THE TAOISEACH, MR. JOHN BRUTON, T.D.,

THURSDAY, 10 OCTOBER 1996

AT 10.30 A.M.

Over the past number of years, a great many people have given so much of their time, resources and talents to bringing about, by agreement, a new order in Northern Ireland - a new order in which the killing and the pains of the past 25 years would be confined for good to the pages of history.

Monday's bomb attack in Lisburn demonstrated clearly the scant regard those who run the Republican movement have for those painstaking efforts. Not only did it undermine the fragile peace in Northern Ireland, but it also damaged the prospects for underpinning such peace by a political agreement.

The timing of this IRA outrage was directly and cynically aimed at destabilising the Loyalist ceasefire. We must not allow the IRA to succeed in what the "Irish News", aptly described yesterday as the betrayal of the people of Ireland.

Some will, hopefully, argue that the Lisburn bomb may be a last spectacular, just to show what the IRA can do, as a prelude to calling a ceasefire. "The volunteers will need something to keep their morale going for a while, so a few people have to be killed" might be one way of putting it. If that is the calculation of the leaders, it hardly suggests that any ceasefire that follows it will involve a real acceptance of the Mitchell principles, by those who ordered the two Lisburn bombs. If that is the calculation, it hardly suggests that a new ceasefire will necessarily "hold in all circumstances". It hardly suggests that the Republican movement has transformed its analysis in any profound way.

This line of argument shows that the IRA will have a significantly difficult task to convince the rest of us that a further ceasefire whenever called is in fact credible and irrevocable.

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But one thing is clear: the Lisburn bombs were intended to cause the maximum number of deaths and injuries - to shatter as many lives as possible, to leave as many men and women as possible paralysed in pain, to cause as many bitter tears as possible. That certainly was the calculation of those who ordered the Lisburn bomb.

The one clear and loud message that this House must send out to those engaged in or contemplating violence is this: violence and democratic politics do not mix. This House, as the democratic representatives of the Irish people, will always reject and repudiate the fascist tactic of the armalite in one hand and the ballot box in the other. These are not tactics that are alternative to one another. The Republican movement, as a whole, must choose once and for all.

The democratic political process in Northern Ireland is embodied by the Multi-Party Talks which resumed on 9 September. These talks have all the imperfections that are inherent in the democratic process everywhere, but which are especially evident when the divisions are profound. The difficulties encountered in those Talks cannot be used as the excuse or the reason for a heinous act like the Lisburn bombing. Of course the talks are slow; our own Forum for Peace and Reconciliation did not conclude its much simpler task all that quickly, and the divisions there were much narrower than they are in Belfast. Some progress has been made in Belfast.

After all, agreement was eventually reached on Rules of Procedure for the Talks. Senator George Mitchell was and remains the Chairperson of the process. Neither of these agreements would have been conceivable in the failed talks of 1991/92. While the decommissioning issue has caused considerable difficulty, there is an agreed approach between the two Governments on that issue, something that was not there in 1991/2, or even a few months ago. And, if we compare with the 1991-92 talks, there has been, on this very issue, intensive bilateral and trilateral, face-to-face contact involving the Irish Government and the Ulster Unionist delegations, again a step forward. Such intensive dialogue did not take place on any issue in 1991/2.

Irish and British Ministers now meet at least three days every week to discuss how we can move the talks forward. The Tánaiste and I are in constant contact with our counterparts. Never, in history, have the two Governments been working as closely together as they are now. If we need a summit we will have one, but we do not want distractions, public relation exercises, or hints that solutions can be imposed, colonial-style. That is not the way the talks process has been structured in the first place. They have been structured to achieve

Agreement between Governments and a sufficient consensus of the parties in Northern Ireland. That 'and' is important.

The two Governments simply cannot do it on their own. If they could, it would have been done a long time ago.

Look at some examples of what the two Governments have been able to agree since the formation of this Government.

- the Joint Framework Document in February 1995
- detailed communiqués following Summit meetings between the Prime Minister and myself, particularly in November 1995 and February 1996
- Ground Rules for Substantive All-Party negotiations in April 1996
- Procedural Guidelines and a Draft Agenda for All-Party negotiations in June 1996

What we now need is, in addition to agreement and action by the two Governments, is agreement between the two Governments and a sufficient consensus of the parties in Northern Ireland.

Every possible avenue continues to be explored with a view to finding a way in which both decommissioning and substantive three-strand issues can be addressed seriously and in parallel, on the basis of the Mitchell Report. Of course, the Government would have wished for speedier and more discernible progress. And with that aim in mind, we have made an enormous effort, since the talks resumed, to inject new momentum and substance into the process. I have spoken to the Prime Minister on a number of occasions over the past week and officials have been - and continue to be - in intensive, sometimes hourly, contact with their counterparts, including in 10 Downing Street. On Saturday, the Prime Minister and I agreed to renew our efforts to make the talks work and to build on our joint approach to those talks in every way possible.

The joint paper of the two Governments on the issue of decommissioning, published last week, already has demonstrated very clearly our shared commitment to give the process the necessary impetus.

Our proposal was to open negotiations in the three strands on either 7 or 14 October while addressing in parallel the decommissioning issue on the basis of the Mitchell Report. That, in fact, is the only realistic way to achieve

decommissioning, and I would urge the talks participants to work constructively and in good faith to implement all aspects of the Mitchell Report. That Report is the key to a resolution of this issue.

Achievement of full decommissioning, of course, requires in practice the participation of Sinn Féin because the decommissioning we are talking about, is by definition, voluntary decommissioning.

But Sinn Féin's participation is by no means indispensable for the negotiations to proceed and agreement to be reached. No one, armed or unarmed, has a veto.

A fully inclusive agreement would, of course, be preferable.

Accordingly, the Government have worked very hard to enable Sinn Féin to enter the negotiations, which have been under way since 10 June so as to put forward the views of its voters. Channels of communication at the level of officials have been kept open with the sole purpose of bringing about a credible restoration of the IRA ceasefire which, this time, would hold in all circumstances. Logic, and the previous statements of the Republican movement on the peace process dictate that the ceasefire should never have been broken in the first place. That logic, in terms of a restoration, should surely have been reinforced beyond all doubt with the commencement of the multi-party talks on 10 June.

The position now, as it has been since February 1995, is that the Government will continue to carry forward the political process, with or without Sinn Féin.

At the same time, however, the two Governments have demonstrated clearly our commitment to hold open the door to a fully inclusive process. Acts like the Lisburn bombing makes it much more difficult, in the democratic and political sense, to continue to keep open direct channels of communication. It is clear that so far, the Sinn Féin leadership has not convinced the Republican movement as a whole to abandon for good the two-prong approach of politics and violence. Some may well be sincere in trying to do so, but it has been suggested that they have accepted the ground rule that there will be no split in any circumstances. Objectively that means that, in important matters, the hardest of hard-liners have been given the final word. If that be so, let me say this to the hard-liners. If the Republican movement want to be taken seriously as democrats - with all of the benefits which that confers- they will have to get rid of the tactical use of violence - for good. No more Lisburns. No more spectaculars. No more beatings. No more coded warnings. Just the ballot box.

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In what way were the ideals of Tone advanced by the years of IRA violence? The answer is: they were not. That violence deepened existing divisions, and created new ones, between Protestants, Catholics and Dissenters. Before the IRA started their work, many Unionists considered themselves to be Irish. Far fewer do so today, thanks to the Republican movement's counter productive strategy.

I have no doubt but that in the days ahead, many commentators will attempt to analyse the reasons that have brought the peace process to this point. It is important to do that but I would wish to put on the record my views on some of the arguments that I perceive might be made in that regard.

It has been widely argued that Sinn Féin and Republicans were deceived or let down by the slow progress during the IRA ceasefire, in moving into comprehensive talks. There was a delay. The Government certainly would have wished for a start earlier than that we secured, 10 June. But, given the nature and depth of the divisions in Northern Ireland, and the logical necessity of ensuring that the Unionists would actually take part, in the talks, this delay should not have changed the peace analysis of the Republican movement. The fact that delay was sufficient to lead to resumed violence raises questions as to the depth of the IRA's commitment to peace, on any terms other than their own. This is reinforced by the fact that active preparation of violence by the IRA continued long before the ceasefire was ended and long after the talks had actually started.

Fundamentally, the Republican movement appears unable to reconcile itself with the fact that the British presence in Ireland is not the British army or State, but a million Unionists. It seems that they cannot, within their analysis, address Unionist concerns other than in a framework which they know that Unionists cannot accept.

The widely presumed notion that the talks could ever have been speedy, reflects an inability or an unwillingness to understand and acknowledge the profound and the necessarily divisive nature of the issues that the talks set out to address. These talks are about the nature of the state - There are very few, if any, historical examples of quick or easy consensus of agreement being reached anywhere in the world on a matter of this nature between parties as divided as the actual participants or potential participants in the present talks. Hence the talks had to be slow. That should be understood.

I have already dealt in some detail with the decommissioning issue, but I think that further elaboration might be useful. Whatever about the manner in which

At first came to prominence, we have to acknowledge that there were, and are, genuine, deep-seated concerns on this issue. That came across, very clearly, in for example, the presentations made to the Forum by the main Protestant churches. That strong concern had to be responded to. It was bound to be a problem in any talks. As a Government, we faced up to it. Along with the British Government, we set up the International Body.

That Body's report offered a means by which the impasse could be surmounted. It signposted the way to a substantive, all-inclusive process of negotiations. It struck the appropriate balance between the sincere concerns surrounding the issue on the one hand, and the practical considerations involved on the other. More recently, the two Governments, in our joint paper published on 1 October, made clear our firm adherence to the Report as the realistic basis for dealing with decommissioning issues in the talks.

The paper published by the UUP on 30 September does not in our view offer such a basis. I believe that a workable arrangement can be reached and for our part, the Government will do everything possible to bring that about. The Government have in fact already briefed the Ulster Unionist Party - as have the British Government - on our intentions regarding legislation to deal with decommissioning. I am taking the opportunity presented by this debate to announce that - as a further demonstration of our commitment and good faith on this issue - the Government intend to publish this legislation at an early date.

The decommissioning issue will not be allowed to block our path to comprehensive three-strand negotiations.

Turning to the issue of marches and parades, there is no doubt that the events this summer have severely damaged inter-community relations and the climate for dialogue. The sectarian fall-out manifested itself in many sinister ways - boycotts; damage to schools, halls and Churches; arson attacks on private property; interference with people's right to worship; punishment beatings; and murders. All these manifestations are profoundly wrong and point to the depths of divisions that exist. The events of the summer, therefore, underscore the urgency and reinforce the need for the multi-party talks to continue, to achieve progress, and ultimately to reach agreement.

In the meantime, however, the British Government have established an Independent Review of Parades and Marches. The Government will be making a submission, with a view to avoiding a repetition next year of the damaging effects which characterised this year's marching season. We may deplore what happened at Drumcree and elsewhere. But it can never be regarded, in any way, as a credible justification for the IRA return to violence in Northern

Ireland. Holding offensive and threatening parades and killing people are both wrong, but they are not on exactly the same moral level.

Throughout this process, the Government have not only emphasised our rejection of coercion but also the need for balance. The word 'balance' permeates the principles and realities set out in the *Joint Declaration* as well as the proposals outlined in the *Joint Framework Document*. The reason for that should be clear to everyone - an ultimate settlement is contingent on the achievement of a reasonable balance between the positions of the parties on the many issues involved in the three core relationships. One of those balances relates to the whole question of consent. Without agreement and without consent, stable political arrangements for the governance of Northern Ireland are an impossibility. Any resort to force is fundamentally at variance with the principles of agreement and consent. Therein lies a key question and a key challenge not only for Sinn Féin but also for the Republican movement as a whole.

The Loyalist paramilitary organisations and the political parties who offer them analysis deserve great credit for maintaining their ceasefire, even in the face of provocation. I strongly endorse the positions taken by the leadership of the UDP and the PUP, that Loyalist paramilitaries should not have their agenda set by the provocation exemplified by the cynical bombings at Lisburn.

The Loyalist ceasefire has made an enormous contribution to peace and stability in Northern Ireland. We have welcomed the constructive contributions to the talks made by the PUP and UDP and are happy to that their continuing participation was assured. That contribution continues to be needed. The decision to undertake a ceasefire was the right decision at the time. It remains the right decision to uphold the ceasefire.

Let me say this directly to Loyalists, and to Unionists generally.

We, the people, in the Republic have no agenda of a progressive takeover of Northern Ireland, against the wishes of a majority of people there. If there ever was such an agenda or mentality here, it has certainly gone. I believe that it is clear to very many people in Northern Ireland - Unionists, Nationalists and Republicans - that this is so. It has been acknowledged, indeed, as a fact by many independent and objective commentators, including many with a Unionist orientation. There probably are still quite a number of unionist-minded people in Northern Ireland who have not grasped this sea-change that has occurred, not only in the policies of all constitutional parties in this State, but among the population at large. But if those people had been present at the debates and discussions in the Forum for Peace and

Reconciliation, they would have seen that Irish nationalists are far from constituting a hostile monolith.

There is no pan-nationalist front, intent on pursuing a malign agenda to undermine the identity or heritage of Unionists or their involvement in the U.K. Any Government I head would never be part of any such agenda. And, to be fair, I do not believe that such an agenda would be followed by any Government that could be formed from any combination of the parties that are represented in this House.

For all of the parties here have embraced the principle of consent. All of the parties here supported the Joint Declaration made by my predecessors and the British Prime Minister on 15 December, 1993. It is, perhaps, worth recalling here the contents of paragraph 5 of that Declaration. I quote:

The Taoiseach, on behalf of the Irish Government, considers that the lessons of Irish history, and especially of Northern Ireland, show that stability and well-being will not be found under any political system which is refused allegiance or rejected on grounds of identity by a significant minority of those governed by it. For this reason, it would be wrong to attempt to impose a united Ireland, in the absence of the freely given consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland. The Taoiseach accepts, on behalf of the Irish Government, that the democratic right of self-determination by the people of Ireland as a whole must be achieved and exercised with and subject to the agreement and consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland and must, consistent with justice and equity, respect the democratic dignity and the civil rights and religious liberties of both communities"

and the paragraph went on to set out a list of rights, a list which had been drawn up in consultation with, inter alia, loyalist representatives.

As I say, all parties in this House and all constitutional nationalist parties throughout this island, as well as others, supported that position taken by the then Government.

That multi-party agreement was fully replicated in the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation, where constitutional parties sat down with Sinn Féin to see how far could agreement be reached on the realities, principles and requirements of a path to a political settlement. Apart from Sinn Féin, all the parties held absolutely firm to the principle on consent.

While, in a technical sense, the cause of the failure to get unanimous agreement on the Forum's report related to the method of measuring democratic ratification of an agreement emerging from all-party talks, in essence the breach with Sinn Féin came down to consent. The report noted that a substantial consensus had developed around the positions set out by the two Governments in the Joint Declaration.

All the participating parties, apart from Sinn Féin, agreed to a statement, as follows:

"Should (comprehensive, all-party talks) result in an agreement, and if that agreement were democratically ratified, North and South, then the result of the ratification process will represent a valid and legitimate exercise by the people of Ireland as a whole of their right to self-determination".

Sinn Féin did not agree to the reference to "democratically ratified, North and South" but the essence of the matter was that they could not join with all the other parties in accepting the principle of consent, in regard to the wishes of a majority of people in Northern Ireland.

All the parties represented in this House acknowledge that consent, in those terms, does not now exist for a united Ireland and is unlikely to do so in any near future. Our focus has thus been on parity of esteem and equality of treatment between the two main traditions within Northern Ireland, including the right of both traditions to pursue legitimately their aspirations, on the basis of the principle of consent, freely given.

The principle of consent also permeates the Joint Framework Document of the British and Irish Governments. But that document goes further. It clearly states that as part of an agreement confirming understandings between the two Governments on constitutional issues set out in the document - essentially on a balanced constitutional accommodation - the Irish Government will introduce and support proposals for change in the Irish Constitution to implement the commitments in the Joint Declaration - the Irish commitment being that I cited earlier. The Framework Document says, and I quote

"These changes in the Irish Constitution will fully reflect the principle of consent in Northern Ireland and demonstrably be such that no territorial claim over Northern Ireland contrary to the will of a majority of its people is asserted"

The Joint Framework Document sets out the parameters of a possible settlement as seen by both Governments. As such, it naturally informs, indeed

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Constitutes a large part of the basis of, the Government's approach to the multi-party talks. Thus, in preparing for the substantive negotiations we want to see starting very soon in those talks, the Government continues to study amendments to Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution, which would emphasise that it is agreement between people - and not territorial aggrandisement - that we are seeking.

The Government remain committed to pursuing a meaningful peace process that will bring an enduring peace and to a political process that will lead to an accommodation through dialogue. Despite the setbacks, we remain of the view that this would best be done through an effective talks process, conducted in an entirely peaceful atmosphere. But, with or without a ceasefire, and therefore with or without Sinn Féin, we are determined to ensure that the talks process is conducted in such a way that the prospects for success are maximised.